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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 8975
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 8456
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 7366
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TAGS: KISL PGOV PREL BG
SUBJECT: ACCUSED AWAMI LEAGUER SAYS HE IS NOT JMB

Classified By: A/Pol Counselor D. Renz, Reason(s): 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a public confession captured JMB commander Ataur Rahman Sunny alleged that AL Religious Advisor Mohammad Abdullah is part of JMB. Poloff spoke to Abdullah, who said that he has never met Sunny, nor anyone from JMB, firmly believes in AL's secular orientation, and speculates that this might be pay-back from fellow terrorist Mufti Hannan who Abdullah prosecuted. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On February 10, media reported that alleged Jamaatul Mujahedin Bangladesh (JMB) Commanders Ataur Rahman Sunny and Abdul Awal implicated Awami League (AL) Religious Secretary Mohammad Abdullah as a supporter of JMB in their confessions to police. AL officials denounced the statements as "false and baseless" and designed to undermine the AL, media reported.

¶3. (C) Poloff spoke to AL Religious Affairs Secretary Mohammed Abdullah about the truthfulness of the allegations and found him at Sheikh Hasina's residence, where Abdullah said "he stays there at night." He explained that Hasina's husband is unable to get around much and Abdullah is there "to keep him company." Asked if he was there because of any overt threats, Abdullah recounted past threatening phone calls several years ago, but said he stays there at night, moves around Dhaka freely, and recently completed an overnight trip to Chittagong.

¶4. (C) When asked if he was connected to JMB, he replied, "I was astonished to hear my name." Asked if he ever met Sunny, he replied, " I have never seen Sunny," nor any JMB member, nor had the opportunity to be in the same part of Bangladesh with them and explained JMB comes from an altogether different part of Bangladesh, where he never goes. "I am 60 years old, most of JMB are in their 20s and 40s," he said, how am I going to meet them?

¶5. (C) Poloff asked Abdullah about his religious background. He replied that he is a lawyer by trade and attends to Sheikh Hasina's constituency so she can concentrate on larger issues. He said the AL appointed him as its first "Religious Affairs Secretary" to fend off charges that "the AL is anti-religious." Abdullah said he has no special training in religion, has been on the Hajj, but emphasized that the AL is a secular party. Asked about Islamist charges that the AL is anti-madrassah, he said that, "Yes, we are anti-Madrassah if they are used for terrorist training, but we are for

Madrassah education."

¶6. (C) He could think of no reason why he was implicated by Sunny, but told poloff that he was on the BNP government's prosecutorial team when HUJI-B terrorist Mufti Hannan was tried and sentenced for the attempted assassination of Sheikh Hasina. Sunny may have gotten Abdullah's name from Mufti Hannan himself or others in jail, he said. Abdullah found it odd that after 120 days in custody, only now was his name being mentioned in connection with JMB. He did not discount the idea that "he (Sunny) was forced to say this."

Responding to political motivations, Abdullah said that as he was the number one advisor to Sheikh Hasina, the BNP can "get to her by attacking me." The JMB and other political parties are against women in leadership positions and want Islamic law. It is natural for them to attack the AL's female secular leader, Abdullah explained.

CHAMMAS